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ABSTRACT

This report is a quantitatively-based but ultimately purely descriptive study of foreign language modules designed to teach Irish students French, German, Italian, or Spanish in preparation for study, travel, and/or work experience abroad in order to enhance their academic qualifications, vocational prospects, and potential for future mobility. It makes no judgments about the overall success or effectiveness of the language modules, but merely presents the data that has been gathered on such attributes as the number of students enrolled and the levels of various languages which they achieve. (KFT)

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Report from
the Centre for Language and Communication Studies
on the sixth year of extracurricular foreign language modules for students of other disciplines and the second year of foreign language modules in the B.A. (Mod.) in Information and Communications Technology
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University of Dublin ♦ Trinity College

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The foreign language modules that are the focus of this report were first established with financial assistance from the European Social Fund

1 Introduction

David Little

1.1 Objectives, organization and funding

1.1.1 Extracurricular modules

1998–9 was the sixth year in which the Centre for Language and Communication Studies (CLCS) offered foreign language modules to students who were not studying a foreign language as part of their degree course. Modules in French and German have been offered since the inception of the scheme, Italian was introduced in 1995–6, and Spanish in 1997–8. A full account of rates of enrolment, participation and completion is provided in section 2 of this report.

The objectives of the modules are (i) to develop students' communication skills for purposes of study, travel or work experience abroad during their undergraduate years; and (ii) to enhance their academic qualifications, vocational prospects, and potential for future mobility.

Students can take language modules for one or two years; each year of study is complete in itself. Although students in Science and Arts (Letters) who successfully complete their language module have bonus marks added to their annual examination result, the modules are offered to students on a strictly extracurricular basis.

The modules were introduced in 1993–4 thanks to a special grant of £100,000 that the Higher Education Authority made from its European Social Fund allocation: the HEA wished to give the learning of foreign languages a more central role in the undergraduate curriculum. The HEA again made special grants available to fund the modules in 1994–5 (£58,000), 1995–6 (£52,000), 1996–7 (£56,000), and 1997–8 (£56,000). In all four years, however, the grants were confirmed only several months after CLCS had committed itself to providing the modules.

In 1994–5 CLCS created a partial buffer against this uncertainty by securing funding to support a three-year Language Modules Research and Development Project, launched in Michaelmas term 1995. The largest single contribution to this project was a private gift of £105,000. Careful budgeting meant that from the beginning of this project we always had one year's funding in hand and could thus proceed from one year to the next without risk of financial embarrassment.

Early in 1999 the HEA indicated that what had previously been an annual ESF allocation would be part of the College's recurrent grant until further notice. In other words, the long-term future of the extracurricular language modules scheme is now assured, at least at its present level of activity. It should be noted, however, that CLCS was allocated a share of the 1999 funding not for 1998–9, but for the following academic year: in 1998–9 the extracurricular modules were financed entirely by the buffer we had built up. The reason given for this was that current discussion of the undergraduate curriculum may lead to a decision to expand the language modules scheme, which will require a re-examination of funding provision. In my view this decision was both unjust and short-sighted. It was unjust because the financial buffer that sustained the language modules through five years of funding uncertainty was made possible by CLCS's success in securing external research funding. It was short-sighted because to invest at least part of our accumulated buffer in further research and

development would help to prepare for whatever expansion of the scheme may be required in the future.

1.1.2 French and German modules within the B.A. (Mod.) course in Information and Communications Technology

1998–9 was the second year in which CLCS provided fully integrated modules in French and German for all junior and senior freshmen taking the degree course in Information and Communications Technology. These modules are shaped by the same general aims as the extracurricular modules, summarized above, and they are taught according to the same pedagogical principles; but they differ in two important respects. First, because they are a compulsory component of students' main course of study, they impose a variety of additional organizational and administrative demands; and second, in theme and linguistic content they focus on the world of computing.

The ICT modules are funded from the provision made for this new degree programme, so that they enjoy the same long-term security as the degree course itself. In the period covered by this report the Department of Computer Science paid only for the direct delivery costs of the modules; from 1999–2000 it will also make a proportionate contribution to CLCS's infrastructural costs.

1.2 Staffing

As section 2 of this report demonstrates, CLCS's provision of foreign language modules has now grown to departmental proportions. In 1998–9 the modules were co-ordinated by Dr Barbara Simpson, research fellow, CLCS, and taught by Marie-Christine Appel, Jean-Martin Deniau, Georg Grote, Breffni O'Rourke, Laurent Pavesi, Klaus Schwienhorst, Florence Signorini, and Helmut Sundermann. They were also supported in various ways by four of CLCS's research students: Marie-Christine Appel, John Moran, Breffni O'Rourke, and Klaus Schwienhorst. Since the summer of 1998 they have benefited from the services of a full-time secretary – first Martina Cotter, latterly Jane McCarthy (this appointment became permanent in the summer of 1999). The success of the modules and the plaudits that they earn from year to year from our external examiners (see section 3 of this report) are due to the commitment and skill of this team of researchers, administrators, and part-time teachers.

1.3 The debate on the broad curriculum

This report is relevant to the current debate on the broad curriculum in at least two respects. First, it confirms the difficulty of delivering extracurricular courses on a maximally cost-effective basis. The completion rate for junior freshmen enrolling for the extracurricular modules has always been in the region of 40%. Although this compares well with the experience of other institutions, it inevitably entails a degree of waste. Of course, it is possible to argue that such waste is simply part of the price College must pay if it is to offer students an extracurricular enhancement of their studies. Secondly, the success of the ICT modules shows that "non-specialist" students can achieve worthwhile results in foreign language learning even though they may not enter College with outstanding foreign language qualifications.

1.4 CLCS's commitment to a research-and-development ethos

Although the Language Modules Research and Development Project came to an end in 1997, CLCS continues to deliver its language

modules within a research-and-development loop. Currently our principal focuses for research and development are (i) the use of the Council of Europe's European Language Portfolio as a tool for the organization of learning and learner self-assessment, and (ii) the further development of tandem language learning in partnership with the Fachhochschule Rhein-Sieg using CLCS's MOO (text-based virtual reality). These two activities are described in greater detail in section 2 of this report. Here it is worth noting (i) that CLCS is playing a major role in the Council of Europe's piloting procedures, which it is hoped will lead to the introduction of the European Language Portfolio on a large scale throughout Europe starting in 2001; and (ii) that the experience of distance learning we have gained from our involvement in international projects in tandem language learning may well be of interest to other areas in College.

1.5 Future prospects

As noted above, the language modules that are the focus of this report now enjoy a measure of funding security. Needless to say, this has brought significant relief to CLCS. With regard to further expansion, however, the future remains unclear pending the outcome of the current debate on the broad curriculum. In the short term, therefore, I propose to develop the administration of the language modules as a permanent part of CLCS's infrastructure, while seeking ways of further elaborating the distance-learning techniques we have developed using e-mail and MOOs. For it is clear that these must play a crucial role in supporting any significant expansion of the language modules scheme.

2 Language modules in 1998–9

Barbara Lazenby Simpson

2.1 Extracurricular modules

2.1.1 Modules offered

The modules offered in 1998–99 were as follows:

Monday evening
- German for beginners in Arts and Science, Year 1
- German for beginners in Engineering, Year 1
- Italian for beginners in Arts and Science, Year 1
- German for beginners in Arts, Science and Engineering, Year 2

Tuesday evening
- French for non-beginners in Health Sciences, Year 1
- German for non-beginners in Engineering, Year 1
- French for non-beginners in Arts, Science and Health Sciences, Year 2
- German for non-beginners in Arts, Science and Engineering, Year 2

Wednesday evening
- French for non-beginners in Science, Year 1
- French for non-beginners in Arts, Year 1
- German for non-beginners in Arts, Year 1
- German for non-beginners in Science, Year 1

Thursday evening
- Spanish for non-beginners in Arts and Science, year 1

In addition, students who had completed the first year of the Italian for beginners module in 1997–98 were offered the opportunity to continue their language study on a self-access basis with teacher support on Monday evenings. Two students enrolled for this module and continued throughout the academic year.

2.1.2 Recruitment and rates of participation

The recruitment of students followed the same procedure as in previous years. Publicity and application forms were included in the mailing sent to incoming junior freshmen by the Admissions Office, while separate mailings were made to rising senior freshmen in Engineering (including MSISS) and Computer Science and to students who had successfully completed Year 1 modules in 1997–98.

Table 2.1 and Figure 2.1 summarize the rates of participation through the academic year, expressed as a percentage of the total number of students enrolled for each module.

The pattern of decline in the levels of participation through Michaelmas term was closely similar to that of previous years. The average rate of completion for Year 1 modules was the same as in 1997–98: 40% of students enrolled completed their module. The average rate of completion for Year 2 modules was closely similar, and significantly lower than in the previous year: 42%, compared with 80% in 1997–98. However, this figure conceals, for example, the 80% completion rate of German for beginners 2. Overall, the completion rate reflects the continuing success of these language modules. It seems inevitable that considerable attrition will occur during Michaelmas term, as junior freshmen gradually become aware of their study commitments and of the social opportunities available in College. However, the relative stability of participation rates for the remainder of the year confirms the

Module	Initial confirmed enrolment	Number attending first session	Final total recruitment	Number completing module
Year 1 modules				
German beginners in Arts & Science (Monday)	10 Arts 11 Science	21 (100%)	21	4 (19%)
German beginners in Engineering (Monday)	10 Engineering	10 (100%)	10	5 (50%)
Italian beginners in Arts & Science (Monday)	15 Arts 8 Science	20 (87%)	25	10 (40%)
French non-beginners in Health Sciences (Tuesday)	27 Health Sciences	24 (89%)	28	11 (39%)
German non-beginners in Engineering (Tuesday)	27 Engineering	24 (89%)	28	18 (64%)
French non-beginners in Science (Wednesday)	33 Science	29 (88%)	34	16 (47%)
French non-beginners in Arts (Wednesday)	34 Arts	30 (88%)	37	13 (35%)
German non-beginners in Arts (Wednesday)	18 Arts	15 (83%)	27	15 (56%)
German non-beginners in Science (Wednesday)	33 Science	23 (70%)	36	12 (33%)
Spanish non-beginners in Arts & Science	19 Arts 11 Science	24 (80%)	30	6 (20%)
Year 1 total	**256 students**	**220 (86%)**	**276**	**110 (40%)**
Year 2 modules				
German beginners in Arts, Science & Engineering (Monday)	2 Arts 3 Science 5 Engineering	8 (80%)	10	8 (80%)
French non-beginners in Arts, Science & Health Sciences (Tuesday)	16 Arts 14 Science 6 Health Sciences	22 (61%)	36	16 (44%)
German non-beginners in Arts, Science & Engineering (Tuesday)	10 Arts 18 Science 5 Engineering	19 (58%)	33	14 (42%)
Year 2 total	**79 students**	**49 (62%)**	**79**	**38 (48%)**
Overall total	**335 students**	**269 (80%)**	**355**	**148 (42%)**

Table 2.1
Rates of participation

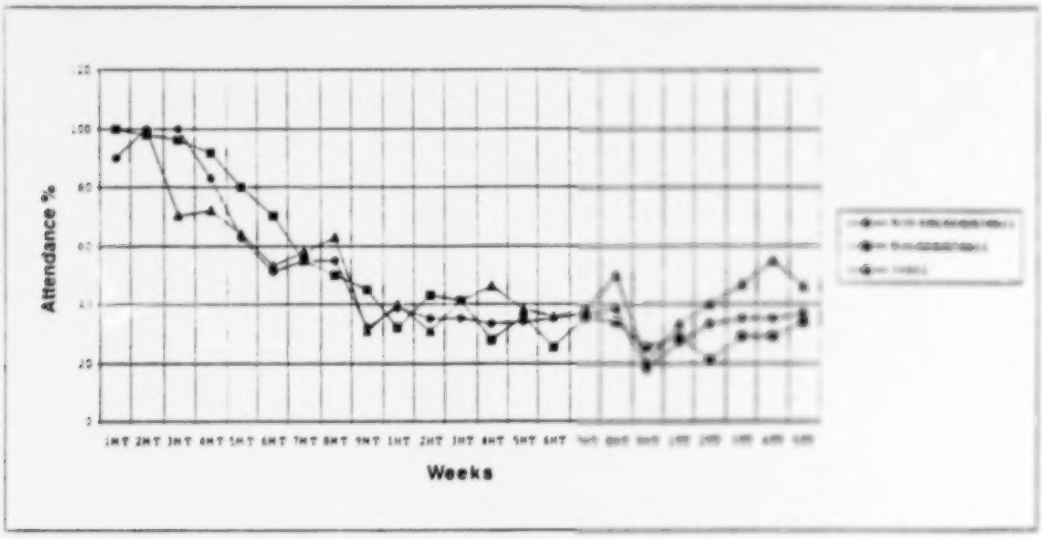

Figure 2.1
Rates of participation

commitment of a considerable number of students to what, after all, is an extracurricular course. 148 students completed their module in 1998–99 (42% of the recruitment total).

2.1.3 Design of the modules

The project cycle structure introduced in 1997–98 was used again in all the modules. Following a period of induction in the first weeks of Michaelmas Term, each module comprised a series of four-week project cycles, each of which culminated in oral presentations with associated written requirements. Projects are undertaken collaboratively by groups of four or five students. The rationale for such an approach is threefold. First, it facilitates use of the target language, which is a prerequisite for successful learning. Native speaker student assistants are employed to work with each group, and in this way use of the target language quickly becomes the natural medium of communication. Secondly, project work allows students to focus on topics that they find interesting and relevant: the task descriptions which are distributed at the beginning of each project cycle are broad enough to encompass a wide range of topics as well as proficiency levels. Students are explicitly encouraged to draw on their major areas of study in preparing their projects.

Thirdly, the skills inherent in the preparation and presentation of projects are not only typical of good learning practice but are also transferable to other domains, including the world of work. Among the skills which students must reflect upon and develop are:

- the ability to work effectively as part of a small team, as well as on an individual basis;
- the use of technologically-based resources during the research phase of a project;
- the effective presentation of information, using a variety of visual aids.

The commitment that most students showed to their projects and presentations testifies to the success of this course design.

In the 1998–99 modules the use of a learner dossier was continued and further developed. Students were expected to submit a personal vocabulary list, a full bibliography, written text, and source documents on the same day as each oral presentation. This requirement was met with differing degrees of commitment: while some students demonstrated a well-developed capacity to organize their work, others tended to submit their dossiers late and incomplete.

CLCS is currently piloting a version of the Council of Europe's European Language Portfolio (ELP) with students taking the language modules. Each student received a copy of ELP during Hilary Term and it

became the focus for reflection, self-assessment activities and the compilation of a learning dossier. Self-assessment, using the Council of Europe's Common European Framework, proved illuminating both to students and their teachers. In 1999–2000 the process of self-assessment will be formalized by including it as part of each student's continuous assessment.

2.1.4 Design of assessment procedures

Continuous assessment was introduced in 1998–99: students were awarded a mark for each of three projects presented in Michaelmas and Hilary terms. The main motivation for this change was the desire to acknowledge the significant amount and quality of work that most students seem

Module	Student numbers	Average mark	Highest mark	Lowest mark
Year 1 modules				
French for non-beginners in Arts	13	62%	68%	54%
French for non-beginners in Science	16	59%	69%	51%
French for non-beginners in Health Sc	11	64%	70%	54%
German for non-beginners in Arts	15	68%	74%	64%
German for non-beginners in Science	12	67%	73%	62%
German for non-beginners in Engineering	18	65%	71%	57%
Spanish for non-beginners in Arts	4	65%	69%	60%
Spanish for non-beginners in Science	2	67%	68%	66%
German for beginners in Arts	1	–	70%	–
German for beginners in Science	3	68%	74%	60%
German for beginners in Engineering	5	66%	73%	63%
Italian for beginners in Arts	7	57%	60%	49%
Italian for beginners in Science	3	58%	59%	57%
Year 2 modules				
French for non-beginners in Arts	8	56%	64%	47%
French for non-beginners in Science	7	60%	62%	56%
French for non-beginners in Health Sc	1	–	64%	–
German for non-beginners in Arts	3	66%	71%	61%
German for non-beginners in Science	7	65%	73%	60%
German for non-beginners in Engineering	4	62%	70%	55%
German for beginners in Arts	2	–	65%	61%
German for beginners in Science	1	–	56%	–
German for beginners in Engineering	5	59%	62%	55%

Table 2.2
Extracurricular modules – assessment results

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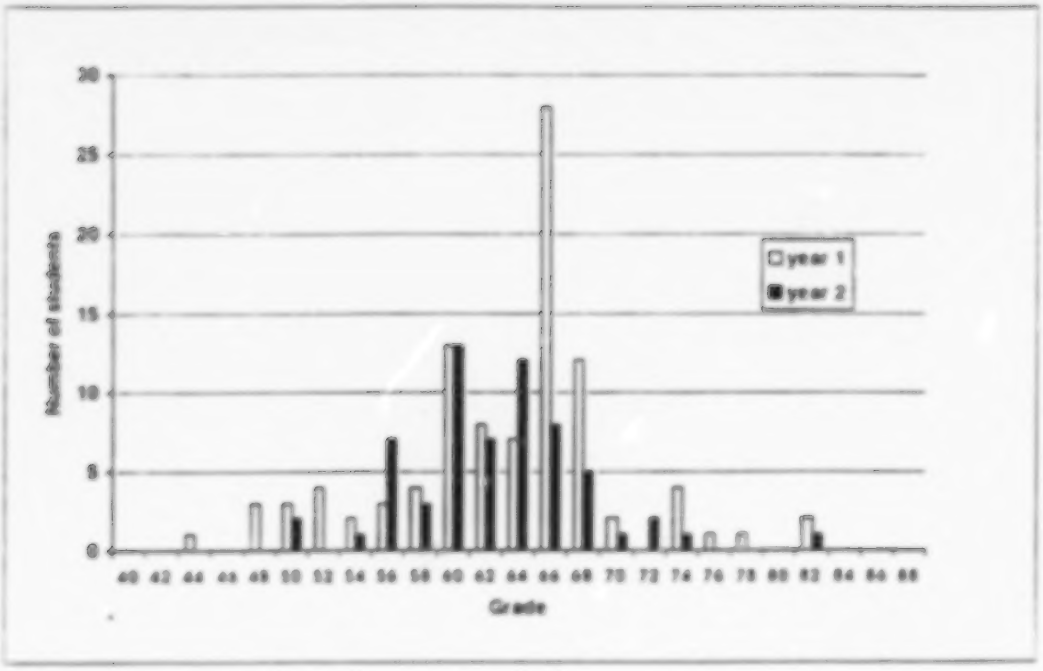

Figure 2.2
Extracurricular modules – assessment results

willing to put into their projects throughout the year.

The marking system used was identical to the one introduced at the beginning of the language modules scheme and modified in 1997–98. Rating grids included the skill categories of phonology, fluency and grammatical control and a fourth category focused on students' use of appropriate vocabulary. Newly learnt vocabulary for each project was recorded by students as a required part of the *dossier*. Teachers carried out the assessment of students' performance during Michaelmas and Hilary terms.

As in previous years, two types of formal assessment were administered in the last two weeks of the modules in Trinity lecture term: (i) a pencil-and-paper test comprising a 100-word dictation and a battery of 4 C-tests, designed to measure students' general underlying control of the target language system; and (ii) a communicative test to assess their ability to deploy their language skills interactively. The communicative test comprised the students' presentation of their fourth and final project. In each case, project presentations during Trinity Term were marked by two assessors and sampled by external examiners in French and German.

2.1.5 Assessment results

148 students completed the assessment process, 110 in the Year 1 modules, and 38 in the Year 2 modules. The results are summarized in Table 2.2 below, which shows the range of student performance classified by module and by faculty. Figure 2.2 allows a comparison between Year 1 and Year 2 modules.

64% of Year 1 students achieved a II.1 grade, and 20% achieved a II.2 grade; while 58% of Year 2 students achieved a II.1 grade, and 32% achieved a II.2 grade. 14% of Year 1 students and 8% of Year 2 students achieved a I grade. As in previous years, therefore, a high proportion of students achieved upper grades. This lends further support to the view expressed in previous reports, that patterns of attrition/completion reflect a process of self-selection: it is the more successful and proficient students who tend to complete the modules.

2.2 Fully integrated modules (B.A. Mod. in Information and Communications Technology)

2.2.1 Rates of participation

In addition to the optional evening modules, CLCS was responsible for the delivery of fully integrated non-beginner language modules as part of the B.A. (Mod.) course in Information and Communications Technology. Students taking this degree are obliged to follow a non-beginner module in either French or German in both their freshman years. They decide which language they will study on the basis of their school subjects and Leaving Certificate results. In 1998–99 the numbers of students completing was 175, broken down as follows:

Year	Total	French	German
JF	112	76	36
SF	63	51	12

These modules comprise one two-hour contact session per week and at least one tutorial meeting with each student per term. Attendance at all sessions is compulsory. During tutorials, learning difficulties are discussed and work is assigned which addresses individual weaknesses. The basis of tutorial sessions in 1998–99 was a written task assigned to each student at the beginning of the academic year. The texts students submitted were analysed by tutors and used as a focus for discussion when the tutorial session took place. Students were then assigned a larger task (approximately six hours' work) to be completed in advance of the next tutorial session.

2.2.2 Course design

The language modules provided for students taking the B.A. (Mod.) in Information and Communications Technology are broadly similar in structure to the extracurricular modules. In the junior freshman year the topics for project presentations include a campaign to promote a particular social or environmental issue, a debate in the target language, and a newsletter aimed at French- or German-speaking students who plan to study at Trinity College. The emphasis is on raising levels of general language proficiency in French and German, as well as developing those skills necessary for the collaborative preparation and presentation of projects.

In the senior freshman year, the language modules are designed with students' principal areas of study in mind. Thus the project topics include the assessment of a piece of computer software, the development of a web-site, and the relation of computers to society. In the course of 1998–9 it became clear that students were gaining much relevant specialist knowledge through the medium of French or German. This link between the language modules and students' main areas of study will be further developed in 1999–2000.

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) was introduced to ICT students during Hilary Term. They were required to use it for two principal purposes: (i) to facilitate a process of self-assessment based on the Common European Framework grid, which is a feature of ELP, and (ii) to gather relevant project materials in the dossier section. The self-assessment process proved successful, and this dimension of the modules will be developed further in 1999–2000: as in the extracurricular modules, self-assessment will be incorporated in the continuous assessment component on the basis of negotiation between teachers and students. The development of a learner dossier raised two important issues. First, it became clear that many students were lax in regard to citing their sources, especially when these were texts downloaded from the World Wide Web. Secondly, some students felt it appropriate to use computer software to translate text which they had written in English. The issues of plagiarism and machine-translated text were addressed during the year and are covered by course regulations for 1999–2000.

2.2.3 Assessment results

Students taking these modules were assessed

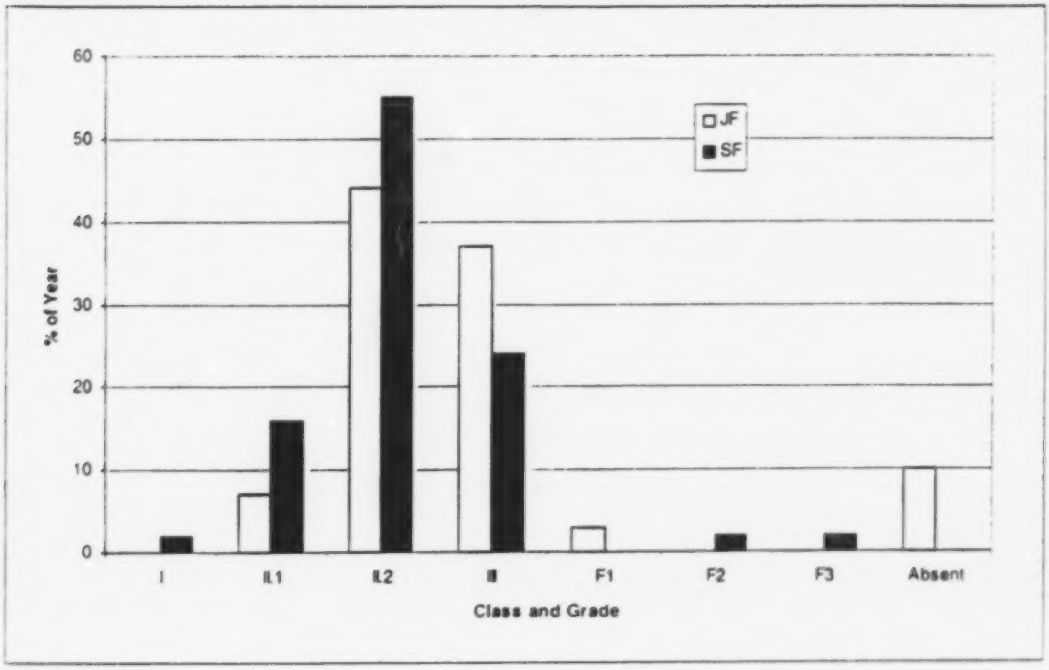

Figure 2.3
BA ICT modules – assessment results

by the same combination of continuous and terminal assessment as students taking the extracurricular modules (see 2.1.4 above). The results are summarized in Figure 2.3. 7% of junior freshmen achieved II.1, 44% II.2, and 37% III. 3% of the class failed at F1 level and 12 students did not complete the year for a variety of reasons. 16% of senior freshmen achieved II.1, 54% II.2, and 24% III. Two students failed their language module examination in Trinity term but passed the Michaelmas term supplemental examination. Two senior freshmen were elected to Foundation Scholarships.

2.3 New directions

A review of all aspects of the CLCS foreign language modules during 1998–9 has resulted in a number of new procedures being put in place for 1999–2000. These also seek to take account of the issues raised in the external examiners' reports (see section 3).

2.3.1 New project cycle

A new project cycle has been introduced in all extracurricular and ICT modules. Entitled "Focus on language", this module is designed to engage students in analysis of the target language as they prepare and modify language learning activities. As with the other projects, students will work collaboratively in small groups, though they will be assessed individually. In the case of the ICT modules this project will be integrated with students' main area of study: in collaboration with relevant lecturers in the Department of Computer Science, the language learning activities will be created as web-based exercises which will be uploaded to the ICT website.

2.3.2 MOOs and e-mail

In 1999–2000 junior and senior freshmen taking the ICT German modules will be involved in a language learning experiment with students of computer science at the Fachhochschule Rhein-Sieg, Germany (these students take an English course that is

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broadly similar to our German modules). Each ICT student will be assigned a German partner according to interest. Junior freshmen will mostly work with their partners via e-mail, while senior freshmen will meet their partners each week in CLCS's MOO (text-based virtual reality) and complete a number of online tasks closely related to their project work. Following the principles of tandem language learning, students will work for half an hour in English and half an hour in German. Sessions will be recorded automatically and sent to each student for individual evaluation, reflection, and future re-use.

2.3.3 Feedback and assessment sessions

In 1999–00 the class immediately following each project presentation will be devoted to feedback and assessment. Groups will meet their teacher (and assessor) in order to receive feedback on their performance and to be given the marks awarded for their oral performance. The inclusion of dedicated assessment sessions is intended to

- provide students with constructive feedback while project presentations remain fresh in their minds;
- raise students' awareness of their performance and abilities by providing both time and space for reflection;
- create regular occasions for self-assessment with teacher support.

2.3.4 Continuous assessment

The continuous assessment procedures introduced in 1998–9 will be applied again in 1999–2000. As noted above, they will now include a self-assessment mark that students will negotiate with their teachers.

Hitherto our assessment procedures have not taken account of the level of individual student participation and commitment. In 1999–2000 10% of the annual examination marks will be awarded on the basis of attendance and participation.

2.3.5 Communication between teachers: language modules newsletter

From the first CLCS's language modules have been innovative and research-based. In order to ensure that they maintain this character, it is necessary to provide for a continuous flow of information between teachers, researchers and the co-ordinator. In 1999–2000 a newsletter will be produced and circulated at least twice per term.

2.3.6 Faculty of Engineering – MSISS

It has been agreed that students of MSISS will be offered places on the extracurricular modules in their freshman years, rather than in their senior freshman and junior sophister years as hitherto. This change is a result of representations made by the students both to CLCS and to the MSISS administrator. In order to effect this change without excluding any students, application forms were sent to incoming junior freshmen and rising senior freshmen students at the beginning of Michaelmas term 1999.

2.3.7 Amendment to rating sheets

The rating sheets used to assess group presentations require that they are interactive. With the diversification of project topics and tasks, this requirement is no longer appropriate in all cases. In future, group presentations will be rated according to the following two criteria:

- students should not read from scripts;
- presentations should show clear evidence of collaborative preparation.

3 External examiners' reports

3.1 French

Dr Vanessa Davies
Director
Diplomatic Service Language Centre
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
London

3.1.1 General

In 1998–9 I began a three-year term as external examiner for the fully integrated French modules taken by junior and senior freshmen in Information and Communications Technology and for the extracurricular French modules offered to the student population in general.

The programme of French modules provided for BA ICT students is coherently designed and presented and demonstrates a clear progression over the two years of study. The basic approach is communicative and the content of the programme is well-focused on the primary discipline/s of the students following this degree course. The programme aims and objectives are extremely well explained to students at the outset and the accompanying handbooks and guides to self-access study (a vital component of the programme) are exemplary of their kind.

The CLCS team is to be congratulated in particular on the quality of the information and supervision provided to students to support their work on the programme. It is a recognised feature of language programmes such as this that significant autonomous learning responsibility is necessarily placed on the individual students, and their success is heavily dependent on the advice and learning support infrastructure which is provided by the programme supervisors.

The extracurricular French modules bring together students from a wide range of discipline backgrounds to follow a coherent and well-planned course designed to improve their communicative fluency in French in relation to their academic discipline and in more general terms. Again, the aims and objectives of the course are well-defined and clearly stated to participants from the outset in a handbook distributed to each of them. Work and assessment requirements are also clearly explained.

The conception and design of both these programmes exemplify best practice for this type of applied language studies module in the European higher education sector. The CLCS provision has been recognised amongst practitioners in the field as highly innovative and consummately professional (see *Report on 5th year of ESF-funded project* and coverage in various international specialist publications). I consider it a privilege to have been able to accept an invitation to become associated with CLCS as an external examiner.

3.1.2 Schemes of work

The CLCS team has produced a highly innovative solution to a problem which, though not uncommon in language centres delivering courses to non-specialist linguists, continues to leave many university language departments perplexed: how to achieve real improvements in communicative fluency and linguistic and cultural awareness with a large intake of students of varying existing levels of competence in the language and low levels of funding. The project-based delivery, the use of native-speaker student assistants and the emphasis on autonomous learning which are characteristics of the CLCS provision are the basis of the solution. Behind this lies tremendous commitment on the part of the tutors and language supervisors, who carry a heavy administrative burden and often a

requirement to deliver courses during unsocial hours. The commitment and enthusiasm of the students is an important factor too.

BA (Mod.) ICT 1 – After a two- or three-week induction phase the course groups proceed to a clearly programmed cycle of projects, each taking 3–5 weeks and culminating in a well-defined output. The scheme is interesting and appropriate to the needs of the students and is closely linked to the assessment scheme. I have not been involved in this programme other than to review the literature provided to students. This is first-rate.

BA (Mod.) ICT 2 – The programme follows on coherently from the Year 1 provision, becoming more specialised and focused on the students' own discipline. The documentation given to students explaining in detail what is required of them for each project is highly professional . No student could possibly claim that s/he did not know what the course objectives were or what was expected of her/him.

In some circumstances project-based work can lead to uneven input and achievement from different members of the group and thus needs to be carefully managed. I have seen little evidence of any individual students "free-loading" as the structure of the work requirement imposed by CLCS would make this very difficult.

The language courses are clearly fostering not only the obvious development of linguistic skills, but also the development of transferable social and professional skills such as team working, initiative and autonomous learning, presentation and negotiation skills. This is commendable, particularly in relation to the development of such skills in computer and information scientists, who often have to struggle against perceptions of them as poor communicators with weak interpersonal skills.

The projects this year were: technology report, software review, web resources, and computers and society. Participants thus have the opportunity to build specialist vocabulary over the year. Each project is presented orally and backed up by written depositions. The distinction between group and individual performance is clearly drawn in each case. Additional individual tutorials are available to participants.

The requirements for the extracurricular French modules are clearly expressed in the relevant handbook. An interesting and varied scheme of work is undertaken by each year group, with each activity exploiting group working techniques to allow participants to progress at their own pace and contribute according to their linguistic abilities.

In the first year, the assignments consist of preparation of the content of a TV programme with a final "live" run through, a campaign poster, a debate, and a newsletter. Receptive and productive written and oral skills are thus practised and improved in an integrated way.

In the second year, the assignment programme consists of the delivery of a seminar in the students' specialist area, a debate, preparation of a web-site, and a newsletter.

It should be clear from the above that the assignments afford the participants opportunities to develop a range of transferable skills in addition to linguistic ones. This no doubt contributes to the success and popularity of the modules at TCD.

3.1.3 Assessment schemes

The assessment schemes for each year on both programmes are very well structured and relate clearly to the learning process and the mode of delivery of the programme. They combine conventional C-testing with continuous assessment: this is generally considered to be the most appropriate formula for evaluating language learning achievement on such programmes.

The documentation describing the assessment criteria for both oral and written presentations is outstanding and could happily be used as a model by other institutions aspiring to the professional standard set by CLCS. They are immediately comprehensible and usable to any external examiner with expertise in the field of (foreign) language competence testing. The

definitions of competence levels have internationally accepted equivalence.

The devising and implementation of such assessment schemes indicates a very high standard of professional expertise and supervision for which CLCS is to be congratulated.

3.1.4 Oral presentations

On 4 and 5 May 1999 I observed the final oral presentations made by students taking (i) the French module in BA ICT 2 and (ii) the Year 1 and Year 2 extracurricular French modules.

The presentations were generally well-organized, with participants being quite clear about what was expected of them. Most students expressed themselves confidently in the foreign language, some exceptionally so. Generally there appears to be a gender divide, the communication skills of female students appearing markedly better than those of male students. This is especially noticeable in the BA ICT cohort.

Absolute levels of linguistic attainment vary in all cohorts. There remain students who demonstrate basic grammatical errors, though it is clear that students have been exposed to an appropriate range of grammatical structures. Not all students have good control of basic structures and often rely on anglicisms and false cognates to get them through a presentation. In some instances, pronunciation quality falls to levels of near incomprehensibility, though this rarely reduces students' confidence as communicators.

It was clear that all students, even given (because of ?) the group work basis for the presentations, had worked hard at the assignments. I formed the general impression that those for whom the modules were extracurricular had actually put more effort into their course and assignments than those for whom the modules are an integral component of a degree programme. Levels of achievement mirror this, though it is quite possible that the cohort of students on the extracurricular modules contains a larger proportion of more able and linguistically competent and motivated students. It is disappointing that some students are not able to gain credit towards their degree programmes for this effort and achievement.

Assessment of the presentations by the teaching teams was consistent, fair and accurate in all cases.

3.1.5 Conclusions

I have referred above to many extremely positive facets of the programmes I have examined. I would nevertheless suggest the following areas might be given consideration by the TCD team for further improvement:

- The problem of the varying levels of motivation and achievement of the two distinct groups of students needs to be addressed. Generally, linguistic aptitude seems lower in the BA ICT group and the nature of the provision may benefit from some adjustments: remedial structural work, encouragement to increased study commitment, additional timetable allocations.

- The modules are designed to capitalise on the fact that all the participants have a specialist area of interest in addition to French. Given this, it would be appropriate to expect that individual students are well in control of the frequently used specialist vocabulary of their fields. This was the exception rather than the rule. Both teachers and learners could gain a "quick win" by focussing more on this aspect, especially in the earlier parts of the course.

- A significant number of students still demonstrate weak grammatical knowledge. I suggest that students presenting this problem are identified at an early stage and offered (further) structured self-study opportunities to improve their general command and fluency. A description of the aims of the year one and year two courses in terms of the structural ground to be covered might be useful. Improvements in this area would not hold back the students who do not show such weaknesses, but would allow the cohort as a whole to increase the overall level of linguistic competence achieved.

- We perhaps need to avoid the notion that if communication appears to have been successful, then correctness of pronunciation is of no consequence. The point is that correct pronunciation is a major contributor to successful communication. A small number of students are making successful contributions to the course and are clearly acquiring new skills, both linguistic and otherwise. But they could only be understood by seasoned teachers of French as a foreign language familiar with anglophone error patterns. Again, I suggest students who demonstrate significant weakness in this area be identified at an early stage and offered laboratory-based self-study opportunities to improve their pronunciation.

3.2 German

Prof. Dr. Dieter Wolff
Bergische Universität
Gesamthochschule Wuppertal
Germany

3.2.1 Introductory

This was my first year as external examiner for the German language modules offered by CLCS. Although I was well prepared by the staff of CLCS for my task, I felt slightly uncomfortable with respect to the overall proficiency I should expect from the students: I had never worked with students of this level and was concerned that I might judge them too severely.

3.2.2 Presentations attended and information received

On 4 and 5 May 1999 I saw three learner groups: BA ICT 2, and the Year 1 and Year 2 extracurricular German modules.

For each class I attended the final assessment session in which the students presented their projects in small groups. The ICT students had prepared presentations on various aspects of the topic "Computers and Society", and students taking the two extracurricular modules had prepared a newsletter targeted at overseas students coming to TCD. The first-year students had been asked to present general information about college life that was likely to be of genuine interest and relevance to prospective overseas students, while the second-year students were expected to focus on specific subject areas like Science, Engineering, and Medicine, and to highlight the particular attraction of each area at TCD.

The teachers of each group gave me the written submissions of their students: the dossiers of the ICT class, and articles, reports and other texts collected and compiled by students taking the extracurricular modules. Before and after each session I was able to talk to the teachers, who gave me information about the group's composition and some of their learning problems. I also had an opportunity to ask questions when students had finished their presentations.

3.2.3 General remarks on course design and assessment procedures

There can be no doubt that the CLCS foreign language modules are admirably designed. They are based on sound theoretical assumptions and seek to realize key concepts in current discussion of second language learning. Language learning as language use, collaborative learning, and the development of learner autonomy are among the most important of these concepts. What I appreciate most in the approach adopted by CLCS is the way these highly theoretical concepts are given practical application. In particular, the way in which project work is made the main working principle of these courses is original and highly efficient. Projects replace the often monotonous textbooks which are still – despite all affirmations to the contrary – grammar-focused and do not take account of students' interests.

The success of project-based language courses very much depends, of course, on the teachers: on their ability to convince the students of the value of this approach and to involve them in the prescribed learning tasks. From what I heard in my discussions with the

teachers and from the results of the courses, it is clear that the teachers are convinced of the value of this approach and are willing to commit themselves much more fully to their students than teachers working within a traditional course framework.

The assessment procedures which are used by CLCS are, as far as I can see, very helpful for the teachers. The idea that both individual students and groups are assessed, but that evaluation takes place within different category schemes is well thought-out. I also liked the detailed description of the possible levels of attainment in phonology, fluency, grammatical control and vocabulary. The assessment categories work very well and make it possible to differentiate very clearly between individual students and learner groups.

3.2.4 Students' oral presentations

The students' oral presentations were, in general, lively and interesting. Most groups followed similar presentation modes. The ICT students tended to engage in controversial discussion of the topics they had chosen; whereas in the extracurricular modules students took turns in presenting successive aspects of their group assignment. There was considerable variety of topic among the ICT students, whereas the task prescribed for the extracurricular modules inevitably elicited closely similar results from all groups. It might be worth trying to devise a more open task for the extracurricular modules, allowing students greater freedom of choice. This might have an additional motivational effect on students' work.

Most of the students spoke freely, only some of them reading from texts they had prepared beforehand. The written reports that were the basis of their oral interactions and at which I looked afterwards showed that students had only rarely prepared full texts. Most of them had simply jotted down words or expressions or outlined the main points of their talk in much the same way as a native speaker might do when preparing a talk.

From a linguistic point of view presentations were, in general, superior to what can be expected after two years of language study at a rhythm of two class contact hours a week even if most of the students had studied German at school. Students spoke fluently, hesitated only rarely, and used appropriate vocabulary and adequate grammatical structures.

Students were sometimes difficult to understand, however. This is clearly due to phonetic interference from English. In the case of the ICT group, I wonder whether the fact that German computer terminology is mostly derived from English has something to do with this. We know from research into bilingualism that the use of words in the other language often triggers a switch over to that language. Similarly, with second language learners the use of L1 words might cause a switch to the phonetic system of the L1. Phonetic interference was less manifest in the extracurricular modules, however, especially in the Year 2 non-beginners class. Indeed, some of the students in this group had near-native control of German phonology.

Grammatical correctness was also a problem for some students. The main source of grammatical difficulty again seems to be the learners' native language. Word order in subordinate clauses seemed to be the main difficulty. It is very difficult to suggest how linguistic correctness might be improved in a course that is concerned to develop communicative proficiency rather than linguistic knowledge. Listening to authentic German as much as possible outside the classroom might help to improve students' pronunciation, while grammatical accuracy might be promoted by increasing the number of written assignments and slightly altering their objectives (I return to this point below).

There is one further observation I should like to make with respect to the oral presentations. In all groups – but especially in the ICT group – students had difficulty handling the speech situation in which they were expected to act. They seemed unfamiliar with the conventions attaching to formal presentations, which made them feel awkward especially at the beginning and end of their talks; and they did not know how to use presentation techniques (posters, overhead projector etc.). This is a language- and culture-independent phenomenon that I observe in my own students as well. Nevertheless, presentation

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techniques are regarded as belonging to the so-called key skills nowadays: learning how to present specific content in a foreign language has become an important qualification in many professional contexts. It might be worth considering including some very basic presentation techniques in the courses and acquainting students with some of the stereotypical rhetorical devices they need in order to present their ideas in an interesting and convincing way. If this becomes part of project work it should not be too time-consuming, however.

3.2.5 Students' written reports

Most written reports submitted by students were résumés, plans for what to say, collections of words and useful expressions etc. Many students had collected materials in German from the Internet which became part of their individual and group dossiers. I believe it is very important that students prepare their oral presentations in written form. For one thing, this is probably the best way of improving grammatical accuracy. It seems necessary, however, to require students to take greater care in making written preparation for their oral presentations. When I looked at students' written submissions I realised that quite a number of them contained the same mistakes they had made in the oral presentation. Some of these mistakes could very easily be avoided if students made better use of basic computer facilities (spelling checkers, thesauruses etc.) while preparing their texts. Others could probably be corrected if students worked together to revise their written texts, and it might be possible to involve their teachers in some of the revision and feedback work.

I have also asked myself in what way the students' written reports could be made better use of. Under present arrangements students hand in their individual contributions to the group presentation, and these are used as the basis for assessing their proficiency in the written language. Would it be possible – I ask this as an outsider – to define the course assignment in such a way that the written part becomes more prominent? I am thinking, for example, of a joint brochure, or something similar, which would give more authenticity to the students' activities and would make them more willing to work on text revisions.

3.2.6 Conclusion

Finally, I should say that having examined these admirably designed languages courses and their outstanding results I felt somewhat envious. The courses offered by the language centre of my own university are certainly modern and highly efficient, but they are not as convincing in their design as CLCS's language modules. The methodological approach developed at CLCS has everything theoreticians always asked for but rarely dared to develop themselves.

Appendix

Summary of income and expenditure

Extracurricular modules

Income			
Brought forward from 1997–8	£56,704		
Miscellaneous income	£31		
Total		£56,735	
Expenditure			
Pay costs	£55,579		
Conferences and travel	£1,436		
Equipment	£338		
Stationery, photocopying and printing	£1,585		
Accommodation and entertainment	£1,304		
Miscellaneous	£199		
Total		£60,441	
Balance (Deficit) at 30.09.99			(£3,706)

BA ICT modules

Income			
Transfer from Computer Science	£24,443		
Total		£24,443	
Expenditure			
Pay costs	£17,035		
Stationery, photocopying and printing	£366		
Learning materials	£2,316		
Miscellaneous	£495		
Total		£20,212	
Balance (Deficit) at 30.09.99			£4,231
Overall surplus (deficit) at 30.09.99			£525